



Health Care for Air Force Women in Operations Desert Shield/Storm Availability, Accessibility, and Adequacy

THE SURVEY

This study was designed as a survey to assess the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of health care provided to Air Force active duty women who were in theater during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm (ODS/S).

The survey questionnaire attempted to answer two research questions:

- What were the gender-unique problems experienced by female ODS/S participants?
- What perceptions do female ODS/S participants have of the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of health care received in theater during ODS/S?

THE RESULTS

Results of the survey research showed both generally high ratings for availability, accessibility, and adequacy, *and* numerous opportunities for improvement.

- ☑ Overall, women rated their health care experience during ODS/S as “very good.” Availability, accessibility, and adequacy were reported as “good” or “very good.”
- ☑ Access level of medical care was reported as high before (96%), during (95%), and after ODS/S (92%)
- ☑ Dental care access was also reported at a high level: 96% before, 91% during, and 94% after ODS/S.
- ☑ Gastrointestinal conditions were reported most often (by 33%)
- ☑ Orthopedic injuries caused the highest rate of provider visits (by 90%).

- ☑ Mental health problems were frequent (20%), while women reported some problems with access (reported difference between actual and desired time to obtain a visit), and a reluctance to seek help (a high prevalence of reported embarrassment).
- ☑ The most frequently reported number of visits for mental health problems was four or more.
- ☑ Women reported a decline in health status (by 16%) and physical-fitness level (by 8.5%), using a definition of an increase in self-reported health status and fitness of “fair” or “poor,” after deployment
- ☑ Cigarette smoking rate increased during deployment (to over 32% from 29%), compared to pre-deployment rates.
- ☑ Women reported those health problems most persistent after ODS/S were gynecological (by 66%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides unique information on the frequency of illness among females during a large-scale, wartime deployment.

Since future deployments are likely to involve substantial numbers of female service members, this information should be highly utilitarian.

Additional detailed information was collected on medical-care visit patterns, satisfaction with care, and other areas.

Follow-on research should be undertaken to investigate possible risk factors associated with the reported declines in health status and physical fitness level.